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SUBJECT: CONG. HASTINGS MEETS WITH PORTUGUESE ROMA LEADER

REF: STATE 30437

¶1. (SBU) US Congressman Alcee Hastings (D-FL), in Portugal for OSCE Parliamentary events hosted by the Portuguese parliament, met with Portuguese Roma leader Antonio Nunes on April 19. Post arranged this discussion to continue our engagement with Roma community, particularly in the period around International Roma Day.

¶2. (SBU) Mr. Nunes serves as the Roma liaison to the Portuguese government and is in daily contact with Roma communities throughout Portugal. He explained that there are an estimated 40 to 50,000 Roma in Portugal both in rural areas and in the large cities of Lisbon, Porto, and Coimbra. The primary challenges they face are those common to all citizens: housing, education, and work. A few years ago the Portuguese government approved a National Action Plan for the Roma, but Mr. Nunes was dismissive of concrete progress made via the Plan. He is not aware of any Roma police or national level politicians, but noted that there are a handful of Roma officials at the municipal level. Nunes observed that Portugal's Roma are better integrated than are Roma in eastern Europe and elsewhere, dressing like and speaking Portuguese, and he concludes that this results in their suffering less discrimination than is the case elsewhere. He shared stories of Roma struggles for jobs and education, and their sometimes uneasy interactions with Portugal's growing African immigrant community.

¶3. (SBU) Cong. Hastings offered readouts of discussions he had in Brussels recently as well as observations of visits to Roma communities in Romania, Hungary, Poland, and elsewhere, noting for example the unhappy plight of Roma in Kosovo. He also reviewed the situation of Roma in the United States. This discussion was useful for both sides, and Mr. Nunes frankly observed that Portugal's Roma are somewhat isolated from events elsewhere in Europe, so he appreciated hearing Cong. Hastings' perspectives.

For more reporting from Embassy Lisbon and information about Portugal, please see our Intelink site:

<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/portal:portugal>

STEPHENSON